

Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion

Statement of Eric J. Hentges, Executive Director  
Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion  
Before the Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development,  
Food and Drug Administration and Related Agencies

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and members of the Subcommittee, for allowing me this opportunity to present testimony in support of the Administration's budget for fiscal year 2006.

With the Nation facing significant public health issues related to the quality of the American diet, I believe that the outcome-based efforts of the Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion are keys to promoting more healthful eating habits and lifestyles across the Nation. Working from its mission to improve the health of Americans by developing and promoting dietary guidance that links scientific research to the nutrition needs of consumers, the Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion has a critical role in how USDA meets its strategic goal to improve the Nation's nutrition and health.

**Trends Show Need for Revised Nutrition Guidance**

**And Educational Tools**

Recent studies of America's dietary habits and physical activity reveal disturbing trends. First, a combination of poor diet and sedentary lifestyle not only undermine the quality of life, life expectancy, and productivity, they contribute to about 20 percent of the two million annual deaths in the United States.

Second, specific diseases and conditions, such as cardiovascular disease, hypertension, overweight and obesity, and osteoporosis, are clearly linked to a poor diet. Recent statistics are staggering with 64 percent of adults (ages 20 to 74) being either overweight or obese. Children have not escaped this unhealthy outcome. Over the past 20 years, the percentage of children who are overweight has more than doubled from 7 to 15 percent, and the percentage of adolescents who are overweight has more than tripled from 5 to 16 percent.

And third, the lack of physical activity has been associated with a number of conditions, including diabetes, overweight and obesity, cardiovascular disease, and certain cancers. Supporting evidence indicates that about 30 percent of women and 25 percent of men get little or no exercise.

### **Dietary Guidelines for Americans Establish**

#### **Federal Nutrition Policy**

In conjunction with the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), USDA released the sixth edition of the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* on January 12, 2005. USDA's involvement is critical in helping to stem and eventually reverse some of these disturbing trends.

The basis for Federal nutrition policy, the *Guidelines*, provide advice for healthy Americans, ages 2 years and older, about food choices that promote health and prevent disease. These *Guidelines* not only form Federal nutrition policy, they also set standards for the nutrition assistance programs, guide nutrition education programs, and

are the basis for USDA nutrition education and promotion activities. *Finding Your Way to a Healthier You*, which is based on the *Guidelines*, is but one of many strategies that will be needed to help consumers make smart choices from every food group, find their balance between food and physical activity, and get the most nutrition out of their calories.

### **Food Guidance System Serves as Premier Teaching Tool**

The updated Food Guidance System, currently recognized as the *Food Guide Pyramid*, is used to help the American public consume a healthful diet. The goals for revising the USDA's Food Guidance System are two-fold: To provide the most up-to-date science and to use better implementation strategies to help Americans develop healthier lifestyles. This new system also supports two pillars of the President's *HealthierUS* Initiative: to "Eat a Nutritious Diet" and to "Be Physically Active Every Day." We expect the new system to be released later this spring.

USDA takes considerable pride in its approach to updating the Food Guidance System by maintaining an open and transparent process that employed the public notice and comment period in the Federal Register. Now, strategic promotion and implementation of the Food Guidance System in both the public and private sectors will be essential in transforming these scientific underpinnings into actionable, targeted strategies that will motivate Americans to develop and maintain healthful dietary and lifestyle habits.

### **Effective Partnerships Strengthen Dissemination**

### **Of Science-Based Guidance and Educational Tools**

With your continued support and with robust partnerships among and between USDA agencies and other Departments, and with information multipliers from nutritionists, physicians, corporations, and others, we are in a much stronger position to address the problems of obesity and overweight. Over the past year, USDA and its partners, including the scientists of the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee, have updated the Nation's nutrition guidance. Now, with the collaborative efforts focused on how best to reach the various populations served by our diverse agencies and Departments, I am confident that we can begin to stem the nutrition- and health-related trends that are so adversely affecting the American public.

I thank the Committee for the opportunity to present this written testimony.